DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 275 132 FL 015 998

AUTHOR Venditti, Phillip; Bahruth, Robert E.
TITLE Enhancing Communicative Competence and Cultural Adaptation of ESL Students: Using Dialogue Journals and Interactive Errands.
PUB DATE Jul 86
NOTE 24p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adjustment (to Environment); *Assignments; College Second Language Programs; *Communicative Competence (Languages); Community Colleges; *English (Second Language); Foreign Students; Higher Education; Idioms; Limited English Speaking; Second Language Instruction; Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Dialogue Journals; *Interactive Errands

ABSTRACT

This report describes two out-of-class techniques used to promote communicative competence among community college students of English as a second language (ESL). Dialogue journals provide regular written communication between language students and their instructors. The journals can be used for validating, encouraging, and reinforcing students' creative impulses and allowing teachers to individualize linguistic input while discussing particular points of individual sociolinguistic interest. Students are encouraged to read teachers' comments on two levels--for meaning and for an understanding of error corrections. Often, errors other than consistent ones are not corrected in order to promote spontaneity and self-correction in writing. Interactive errands include: site visits and team quests, in which students go singly or in pairs to gather information about historical sites or community organizations; human bingo, requiring students to get signatures of several people fitting descriptions related to a topic; and idiom searches, in which the ESL student must interact with several Americans to negotiate the meaning of an idiom. An in-class orientation precedes each interactive errand to equip students with competence and confidence concerning vocabulary, questioning etiquette and terminology, grammar, cultural features relating to the errand, and practice. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED275132

ENHANCING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AND CULTURAL ADAPTATION OF ESL STUDENTS: USING DIALOGUE JOURNALS AND INTERACTIVE ERRANDS

A Paper Submitted July 1986
To the Center for Applied Linguistics
By Phillip Venditti and Robert Bahruth
Parallel Studies Division
Austin Community College
Austin, TX [(512) 495-7137]

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Robert Bahruth

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

FL 015 998

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ENHANCING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AND CULTURAL ADAPTATION OF ESL STUDENTS: USING DIALOGUE JOURNALS AND INTERACTIVE ERRANDS

RATIONALE

It is widely understood that people who leave their native countries and move elsewhere have difficulty adjusting to a new land's language and customs and are likely to have a hard time locating and using community resources. The inconvenience and frustration engendered by this process can be prolonged and debilitating, depending upon how well individuals and systems within the host country respond to newcomers. Educational institutions bear a special responsibility for addressing the needs of these newcomers.

A major distinction exists between teaching a foreign language and a second language. Foreign language instruction is conducted in a country where the language is not spoken outside of the school. The foreign language teacher must, therefore, rely upon texts, films, and other sources of language enrichment within the context of the classroom. Second language instruction, on the other hand, takes place in the host country, where the target language pervades the world of the student outside of the classroom as well. In light of the fact that a rich world of opportunity for meaningful language interaction is available in second language teaching situations, it is ill-advised to operate within the parameters of foreign language methodology in second language instruction.

By itself, time spent in the classroom is clearly insufficient for students to develop the totality of communicative competence described by

Hymes (1972), Krashen (1982), and others as the ultimate objective of second language instruction. Such communicative competence, i.e., the ability to exchange meaningful cognitive and affective information in a full range of circumstances, can only be developed via natural, genuine personal contacts. The out-of-class world is a rich but usually under-exploited resource for the acquisition of this communicative competence.

PROCEDURES TO PROMOTE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Two out-of-class techniques at Austin Community College are employed specifically to pursue the goal of communicative competence among ESL (English as a second language) students. These techniques are dialogue journals and "interactive errands."

Dialogue Journals

Dialogue journals have been described in considerable detail by Hayes and Bahruth (1985); Hayes, Bahruth, and Kessler (1985), and Staton (1980, 1983). Briefly, they are regular written exchanges between language students and their instructors. Students write as much as they please, about whatever they please, directing their messages toward their teachers as human beings rather than as judges of grammar or composition. Instructors then write individual responses. Journals may be shuttled back and forth on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.

Dialogue journals are utilized at Austin Community College in a number of distinctive ways which capitalize upon their potential for validating, encouraging, and reinforcing the creative impulses of students so that their confidence will be nurtured. At the same time, these approaches provide an opportunity for instructors to individualize linguistic input while

discussing particular points of sociolinguistic interest relevant to each student's reality.

We use dialogue journals at ACC in such a way as to take seriously Freire's insistence that "Words should be laden with meaning of the people's existential experience, and not of the teacher's experience" (1983, p. 10). Urzua's comments (1985), though directed toward instruction with children, also apply to our method of using dialogue journals:

> Good second language teachers, then, employ the "hanging-in-there" strategy. Besides employing many of the strategies in interacting with the children which are known to be effective in first language acquisition, teachers of ESL children should also be consciously aware of their ability to provide vocabulary and relevant surface forms at times when children require them in specific contexts. Children will learn those words and surface forms which code the experience they are having. (p. 224).

The exchange of journal entries shown in figure 1 typifies the kind of personally relevant experiences which students describe in their dialog journals:

Student's entry:

Dear Phil,

Yesterday I had a flat tire when I drove to A.C.C. I was very discouraged about that. The car stopped on the middle of the road. I couldn't move it myself. At this time, two Americans stopped their cars to help me. After that, they asked me whether I needed help to change the tire. I was moved by them. It was rush hours. They were driving to work. Time is money. But they don't care. It makes me change some ideas about the Americans. Some article, that I read in China a few years ago, described that the Americans paid respect to money. All things they do are for money. Now I have a new knowledge about the Americans.

--Benny

Instructor's response:

Dear Benny,

Thanks for sharing your experience with me! It's really unpleasant to get stuck in the middle of the road, so it's fortunate someone stopped to help you the other day despite the fact that it was rush hour. I can see why that experience made some of your ideas change about Americans.

I think you may continue to be surprised at some of the ways people in this country behave. Sometimes you'll be pleasantly surprised, and sometimes you'll probably be shocked and discouraged. Your knowledge will continue to grow, and I hope you'll enjoy this process. Also, will you write about your background in China and your plans for the future? I look forward to learning more about you.

--Phil

Figure 1: Personal Experiences Disclosed Through the Dialogue Journal

A variation of the dialogue journal which has been employed at Austin Community College after students are fully familiar with the journal-writing process calls for classmates to write journal entries to each other. The resulting interchange increases communicative interaction without adding to the burden of the instructor. It also helps to cultivate friendships among classmates, thereby improving the communicative atmosphere of the classroom.

A further "plus" of dialogue journals is that counseling is facilitated through their writing. Students often pose questions related to their individual problems or concerns. Many times these problems arise out of cross-cultural conflicts, and an instructor who is sensitive can be an invaluable source of clarification, support, and encouragement. Consider the interchange illustrated in Figure 2:

Student's entry:

Dear Robert,

Today is my co-worker's birthday. She had a party in the company's cafeteria. I saw her preparing the party with her friend. I was in the cafeteria but I didn't know that it was her party until I got back to work. I wasn't invited to the party. When I was back to the cafeteria for a break after working time, the party was over everything was cleaned up. She came to me and asked "Did you get a piece of cake?" If you were me, what do you think about her? We have been working together for a long time. Is it a normal way to ask others if they want to have the rest of a cake?

--Bill

Instructor's response:

Dear Bill,

What happened may have been the result of a misunderstanding. Maybe she expected all of her friends to just come without inviting them. In your country it may be necessary to invite each person, but if this was just an informal gathering she may not have invited anyone. If you think she is your friend why don't you ask her? Perhaps she is wondering why you didn't come to eat cake as well!

--Robert

Figure 2: Cross-Cultural Counseling Through the Dialogue Journal

In replying to students' dialogue journal entries, instructors treat linguistic errors as signs of progress rather than as marks of deficiency. Students' journals are never defaced with the tracks of a red pen. Instead, instructors integrate into their own journal responses the structures with which students are experiencing difficulty, underlining appropriate forms so that students will understand linguistic conventions in context.

Students are instructed to read the journals on two levels. Their primary focus should be on the meaning in the instructor's response, but once that has been understood the students are instructed to go back over each pair of entries to discover why certain forms were underlined by the instructor. To achieve this discovery they must search out their own "errors," which are still hidden in their untouched entries. Figure 3 portrays the process by which the instructor can provide individualized linguistic feedback (in this case, syntactic) in a meaningful context:

Student's entry:

Dear Robert,

The Spring Break is over then we continue our work again. I calculate in retrospect that I had learned many things new from the class so far. My notebook is considered as a mirror to reflect the changes in me. I put down anything new I learned from you on it and learn from day to day. Sometimes I coudn't believe at myself if I didn't have a notebook. so I appreciate it very much. even though I stop learning one day, I will keep it all my life. It's my past the notebook represents on it.

--Tom

Instructor's response:

Dear Tom,

I'm sure your notebook reflects the many new things that you have learned so far. The journal is an even clearer reflection of your progress. If you go back to the first few entries in this journal I'm sure you'll recognize many errors in your writing that you didn't recognize then. This shows that you are constantly improving.

--Robert

Figure 3: Linguistic Feedback Through the Dialogue Journal

It should be understood that, in correcting students' writing, instructors attend primarily to errors which appear consistently in the students' writing. Many erroneous usages will disappear spontaneously as students gain their footing as journal writers and pattern their composition after the instructor's example. Heath (1985) argued in favor of such contextualized writing, over which students have ownership, in a report upon some of her research:

> For most of the students, within the first five letter exchanges, eighty to eighty-five per cent of their words were spelled correctly, and they had left behind many of their mechanical errors. Modelling their correspondents' writing, they intuitively picked up features such as proper use and punctuation of salutations, closings, etc., and they imitated the structures of the opening sentences of paragraphs, as well as ways of introducing topics in their letters. (p. 24).

Another advantage to leaving students' original texts unmarred is also exploited via dialogue journals. Since adults tend to progress at a much slower rate than children, many begin to complain that they don't feel they are learning anything. At this point, if students go back to their earlier entries to re-read them, they soon discover their own errors, this time without needing the cues supplied in the instructor's entries. A typical response is "I can't believe I wrote that!" This sort of revelation helps students over psychological barriers which can be self-defeating, and it usually gives a tremendous boost to their motivation. Experience at ACC and

elsewhere has demonstrated that students who write dialogue journals almost invariably improve in grammatical correctness, complexity of subject matter, and freedom of expression over the course of a semester.

It is important to note here that students' progress is on an individualized level. Each student advances at his or her own pace while receiving fine-tuned input rather than having to rely solely on the generic rough-tuned input of group instruction. In addition to their progress along these purely linguistic dimensions, students also typically develop a more relaxed and positive attitude toward classroom interactions with each other and their instructor as they get to know one another in writing. Figure 4 includes excerpts from two students' journals which bear out this point:

Especially, by diag-journal. the relationship between teacher and students got more improvement. It increases our understanding each other, changes the old traditions. It is as if you were our classmates. I don't know about American students. In China, students are afraid when they are talking with teacher. More or less they feel nerves. But in your class I never feel that.

I just noticed that I'm very relaxed when I write the dialog journnal. It's a nice way of learning. To me it's like a break I take during the day... To tell you the truth I didn't believe in them the first time you told us about them. But now I see that the more you write the more errors you have and the more you learn.

Figure 4: Students' Favorable Comments About the Dialogue Journal

Interactive Errands

ESL students at Austin Community College are sent into the surrounding community on interactive errands in order to develop linguisti and sociolinguistic competence which can smoothe their adaptation to life in the United States. Some examples of interactive errands are site visits, team quests, "human bingo", and "idiom searches".

Site visits and team quests send students, singly or in pairs, to gather information about historical sites or community organizations, or simply to collect expressions from bumper stickers on cars. These errands tend to be the least threatening, since they require interaction with texts rather than with human beings. They help mobilize students and familiarize them with their community. They also supply useful cultural and social information. Communicative interaction in dyads between classmates who are already friends is an added benefit.

Human bingo requires students to get the signatures of several people who fit a number of descriptions revolving around a common topic. These errands provide opportunities to practice question forms and pragmatic functions such as greetings, turn-taking, requests, and leave-taking. They also provide opportunities for the students to discover that, when social conventions are observed (e.g., "Excuse me,..."), most Americans are more than willing to cooperate. Figure 5 displays sample human bingo sheets:

INSERT FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE

Perhaps the most sophisticated of these errands is the idiom search because the students must interact with Americans to negotiate the meaning of the unknown. They are required to ask a minimum of three native speakers to explain the meaning of an idiom and to give contextualized examples. Idiom searches incorporate many of the skills students have been practicing while performing the preceding errands, plus calling upon them to probe for meaning and ask for clarification when examples are not understood.

Ideally, interactive errands are introduced, conducted, and evaluated in a purposive fashion. At Austin Community College, a three-part process is followed in order to capitalize best on the advantages of the method. Diagram 1 depicts this three-part process by means of a program decomposition model originated by Borich and Jemelka (1982). In this diagram, the rectangular boxes represent educational transactions; the vertical lines from above the boxes emanate from human and material constraints upon those transactions; elements entering the rectangles via arrows from the left are inputs; and arrows emerging from the right side of the boxes are outputs determined by the nature of the transactions.

INSERT DIAGRAM 1 ABOUT HERE

In-class orientation. An in-class orientation process precedes each interactive errand to equip students with the necessary competence and confidence. Among the ingredients in such an orientation are generally vocabulary, question-asking etiquette and terminology, grammar, cultural

features related to the topic of the errand, and an opportunity to practice asking and answering questions with each other.

For the first "human bingo" sheet shown in Figure 5, for example, the instructor might lead students through the following sequence of activities before dispatching them to collect signatures:

1. Exploring the meanings of "outdoor grill," "food processor," "granola," and other unfamiliar terms.

2. Explaining the advisability and mechanics of setting the stage before posing questions to strangers or casual acquaintances. (It's probably not a good idea to meet a stranger and say, "Hi. My name's Abdullah. Have you ever used a doggie bag?")

3. Reviewing English question forms; e.g., it is appropriate to ask "Do you wash dishes every day?" but *not* "Do you have made apple pie?"

4. Discussing why Americans might or might not bake bread as much today as they did forty or fifty years ago; what kind of person might be most likely to use a food processor, eat at salad bars, or participate in activities against world hunger; how common fast food chains selling ice cream may be in large American cities; etc.

5. Having the class split into pairs or two large groups to role-play the process of asking an outsider questions from the bingo sheet, and following up the practice with a group discussion of rough spots, etc.

Performing the errands. Like dialogue journals, interactive errands maximize students' control and direction over their own learning experiences. In working on a human bingo project, for instance, students are able to approach potential signatories when and where they feel most comfortable doing so. They are free to ask anyone they choose to sign their

bingo sheets, which allows them to proceed at their own pace from less-demanding encounters to others which call for initiative and pluck.

Furthermore, students are bound to do and learn more in the process of preparing for and performing interactive errands than simply completing the relatively uncomplicated tasks required by the errands themselves. They may experience social situations and learn facts which otherwise would be slow in coming to them as newcomers to the United States. By fulfilling the terms of an academic assignment such as a site visit or idiom search, foreign-born ESL students whose home environment is monolingual may gradually develop a desire and capacity to venture out into English-speaking society on their own in the future. Because they incorporate speaking, listening, reading, and writing, interactive errands may contribute to students' holistic personal development.

De-briefing and skill adjustment. After they have completed an interactive errand, students are given a chance in class to share and describe the encounters they went through. If six students have conducted a community site visit to a library or hospital, for example, one or two of them might present an oral report to the rest of the class. At this point, the instructor can gauge how difficult the errand was in practice, how adventurous different students were in carrying it out, and how much students actually learned from the errand. Following up this classroom process with an interchange in the dialogue journal is another way for the benefits of an interactive errand to be identified and solidified.

CONCLUSION

The process through which foreign-born students adapt to life in America comprises many components. Three of these components--learning

our language, understanding our culture, and finding out how the organizations and facilities of our communities can be used--are within the power of a strong ESL program to achieve. If they institute dialogue journals and out-of-class interactive language errands, we believe that ESL instructors will be well on their way to enhancing the communicative competence and contributing to the cultural adaptation of their students.

References

Borich, G., & Jemelka, R. (1982). Programs and systems; An evaluation perspective. New York: Academic Press.

Freire, P. (1983). The importance of the act of reading. Journal of Education, 165(1), 5-11.

Hatch, E.M. (1983). Psycholinguistics; A second language perspective. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Hayes, C., & Bahruth, R. (1985). Querer es poder. In J. Hansen, T. Newkirk, & D. graves (Eds.), Breaking ground: Teachers relate reading and writing in the elementary school (pp. 97-108).

Hayes, C., Bahruth, R., & Kessler, C. (1985). To read you must write: Children in language acquisition. San Antonio, Texas: University of Texas-San Antonio. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 257 313)

Heath, S.B. (1985). Literacy or literate skills? Considerations for ESL/EFL learners. In P. Larson, E. Judd, & D. Messerschmidt (Eds.), On TESOL '84 (pp. 15-28). Washington, DC: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.

Hymes, D. (1972). Models of the interaction of language and social life. In J. Gumperz & D. Hymes (Eds.), Directions in sociolinguistics: The ethnography of communication. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Krashen, S.D. (1982). Principles and practice in second language acquisition. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Paulston, C.B. (1974). Linguistic and communicative competence. TESOL Quarterly, 8, 347-362.

Staton, J. (1980). Writing and counseling: Using a dialogue journal. Language Arts, , 514-518.

Staton, J. (1983). Dialogue journals: A new tool for teaching communication. ERIC/CLL News Bulletin, 6 , 1-2; 6.

Urzua, C. (1985). How do you evaluate your own elementary program? Look to kids. In P. Larson, E. Judd, & D. Messerschmidt (Eds.), On TESOL '84 (pp. 219-232). Washington, DC: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.

"HUMAN BINGO" FOR ESL LEARNING
Austin Community College--Spring 1986

FOOD

Get the signature of someone who...

Ate breakfast today	Has an outdoor grill at his/her home	Doesn't like sausage on pizza	Owns a blender or a food processor
Likes to bake bread	Has eaten granola	Has made apple pie	Likes to drink black coffee
Has been to a state where peanuts are grown	Washes dishes every day	Can tell you where a Baskin-Robbins store is located	Likes to eat at salad bars
Has used a doggie bag at least once	Knows someone who is a vegetarian	Has participated in activities against world hunger	Eats watermelon or tomatoes with salt

Figure 5, A. Sample "human bingo" sheets.

"HUMAN BINGO" FOR ESL LEARNING
Austin Community College--Summer '86

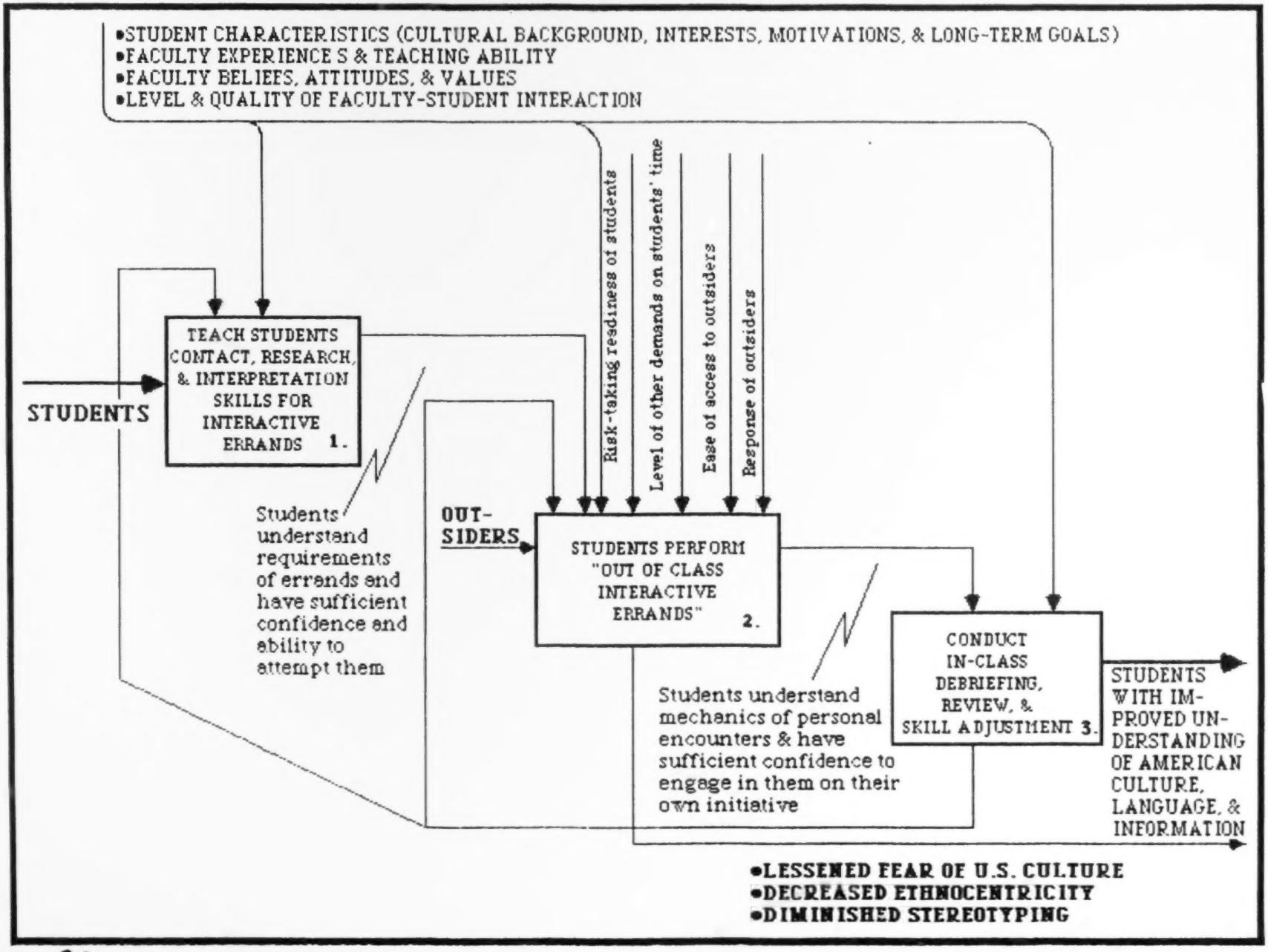
RACE, ETHNICITY, HANDICAPS, & DISCRIMINATION

Get the signature of someone who...

HAS SOME ANCESTORS WHO CAME TO THE U.S. FROM ITALY	KNOWS WHERE ELLIS ISLAND IS LOCATED	CAN DEFINE "WHITE FLIGHT"	BELIEVES IN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION
WAS BORN BEFORE SEGREGATED SCHOOLS WERE ABOLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES	KNOWS AT LEAST ONE "INTERRACIAL" COUPLE	BECAME A U.S. CITIZEN IN THE PAST 10 YEARS	HAS HEARD OF THE KU KLUX KLAN
KNOWS WHAT HANDICAP FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT SUFFERED FROM	KNOWS WHAT A POLL TAX WAS	HAS HAD A BROKEN LEG AT SOME TIME IN HIS OR HER LIFE	CAN REMEMBER THE DAY WHEN MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., WAS ASSASSINATED
DISAGREES WITH THE CONCEPT OF COMPARABLE WORTH	HAS A FRIEND WHO IS VISUALLY IMPAIRED (BLIND)	SPEAKS A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH FLUENTLY (BUT IS A NATIVE-BORN AMERICAN)	CONSIDERS HIM- OR HERSELF TO BE AFRO-AMERICAN

Figure 5, B. Sample "human bingo" sheets.

DIAGRAM 1


•STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS (CULTURAL BACKGROUND, INTERESTS, MOTIVATIONS, & LONG-TERM GOALS)
•FACULTY EXPERIENCE S & TEACHING ABILITY
•FACULTY BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, & VALUES
•LEVEL & QUALITY OF FACULTY-STUDENT INTERACTION
STUDENTS
TEACH STUDENTS CONTACT, RESEARCH, & INTERPRETATION SKILLS FOR INTERACTIVE ERRANDS 1.
Students understand requirements of errands and have sufficient confidence and ability to attempt them
Risk-taking readiness of students
Level of other demands on students' time
Ease of access to outsiders
Response of outsiders
OUT-SIDERS
STUDENTS PERFORM "OUT OF CLASS INTERACTIVE ERRANDS" 2.
Students understand mechanics of personal encounters & have sufficient confidence to engage in them on their own initiative
CONDUCT IN-CLASS DEBRIEFING, REVIEW, & SKILL ADJUSTMENT 3.
STUDENTS WITH IM-PROVED UN-DERSTANDING OF AMERICAN CULTURE, LANGUAGE, & INFORMATION
•LESSENED FEAR OF U.S. CULTURE
•DECREASED ETHNOCENTRICITY
•DIMINISHED STEREOTYPING